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STORY
OF
THE RED BERRIES.

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STORY OF THE RED BERRIES.

Rama was an only child, very dear to his father and his mother, who took great pleasure in teaching him all that a little boy of seven years old could be expected to learn.

Rama had an uncle who lived in the country, where he had a very fine house and a nice garden. Rama was taken by his father and mother on a visit to his uncle. The day after they arrived, Rama asked permission to walk by himself in the pretty garden. His mother said he

might do so when his lessons were finished. His father also agreed; but said, "Be sure, Rama, you do not eat any thing that you find there."

Rama promised; and having said his lessons, away he ran, quite delighted, into the garden. There were many beautiful flowers. Rama admired the fragrant white jasmine, the yellow champaca, the clusters of red roses, some just budding, others in full bloom.

But Rama was still more pleased with the fruits. Some of them he knew very well; as the delicious mango, the guava with

its strong flavour, the round pomegranate, and the grapes hanging in rich clusters. There was one fruit, however, which was new to him. He saw a bush, covered with berries of a deep scarlet colour, soft to the touch, and bright to the eye. Rama looked long at them; then he ran round and round the neat walks, but still returned and stopped opposite the bush. He said to himself, "If my father had not forbidden me to eat any fruit, I should like to pull a few of those delightful berries. How sweet they must be!"

While Rama was playing, his

uncle came up and asked him how he liked the garden. "Very much indeed, uncle," replied Rama. They walked a little while together. Presently they passed the bush which bore the beautiful red berries, and the uncle, seeing how his nephew looked at it, said, "You must be sure not to eat any of those berries, Rama." "Oh, no, uncle," answered Rama; "my father desired me not to gather any thing."

The uncle said, "I know it, my dear; and you will always find it your happiness, as well as duty, to obey your parents." After

dinner there was fruit; mangoes, custard apples, guavas, and grapes; but Rama was disappointed at not seeing any of the fine red berries.

The next day Rama walked round the garden before break-fast. As he passed the bush with the red berries, he said, "Oh! my uncle keeps this nice fruit for himself. How mean! he deserves to lose some of it."

This was a very improper say-ing. If Rama's uncle did wish to preserve the berries, they were his own, and he had a right to do as he pleased with them. If he did not give them, it was wrong

to suppose that he acted from a selfish motive. Rama was inclined to commit a sin, and he wanted to find an excuse.

After breakfast, Rama asked leave to walk again in the garden. "You may do so," said his father; "but remember my charge, not to gather any thing without leave." "Yes, father," said Rama, and walked off. What do you think you did? First I will tell you what he might to have done. He should have avoided the place where he knew that he would be led into temptation, and have earnestly asked God to help him to oppose his evil wishes.

But, alas! little Rama did none of these things: on the contrary, he went as fast as he could to the bush, and gazed on the red berries till it seemed impossible to leave the spot without tasting them. His heart began to beat very quick, he looked about him, thought of his father's command, and then, yielding to the temptation that he might have avoided, he put forth his hand, snatched several berries, and swallowed them in great haste and alarm, for he heard his father calling to him from the gate of the garden.

The berries were not so sweet as Rama expected, but slimy,

and of such a sickening taste that he was soon very sorry for not having followed the advice of his father. Before long he became very sick, and had a burning feeling in his stomach. His mind also was troubled, for he knew that he had done wrong. He was laid upon his bed, but he grew still worse, crying and sobbing most piteously. If you had seen little Rama you would have owned that even a long feast on the most pleasant fruit would have been dearly bought with such suffering.

Rama's parents were deeply distressed. It was plain that he

had eaten something of a poisonous nature. For a long time Rama could not speak; but as soon as he could, he confessed his guilt, asking pardon, and promising never to do so again.

The beautiful red berries were poisonous. That was the reason why Rama's uncle told him not to touch them.

A skilful physician was sent for, who gave some medicine, and, under his treatment, Rama recovered, to the great joy of his parents. The poor child felt deeply on account of his sin, and earnestly sought pardon from God, through Jesus Christ the Saviour.

Children are ready to think that their parents are too strict, and that they would be happier if they were allowed to do as they please. This is a great mistake. Parents dearly love their children and wish them to be happy; their only desire is to keep their children from doing things which would be harmful to them. A very little child, in its mother's arms, would put its hand to the flame of a lamp, if it were allowed. Grown up children often wish to do things equally injurious.

We have all acted like Rama, who ate the red berries, tempted by their beautifnl appearance.

God, our Father in heaven, has told us not to eat the poisonous fruit of sinful pleasures; but we have disobeyed His commands. Without a skilful physician, we must all die. But there is One able to heal us. When men sinned, God gave His Son Jesus Christ, to die in their room, and pardon is freely offered to all who accept His mercy. God also gives us His Holy Spirit to cleanse our hearts, to make us like Himself, and fit us for heaven.

Accept God's gracious offers. Trust in Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and strive through the help of the Holy Spirit, in time

to come, to avoid every thing sinful. Watch and pray against temptation. Shun companions who would entice you to do wrong. Ever bear in mind the words, "Thou God seest me."

Almighty God, thy piercing eye
  Strikes through the shades of night,
And our most secret actions lie
  All open to thy sight.

There's not a sin, that we commit,
  Nor wicked word we say,
But in thy dreadful book 'tis writ,
  Against the judgment day.

Lord, at thy feet ashamed I lie;
  Upward I dare not look:
Pardon my sins before I die,
  And blot them from thy book.

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